



City of Lowell – Lowell Sustainability Council

2/15/2022

Dear Lowell City Councilor-_____

For the past thirteen years, the Lowell Sustainability Council has been helping the City of Lowell meet the social, environmental, and economic challenges brought by climate change. In the past, we have made recommendations to the City Council on policy and practice. We have held summits to educate the public and we have participated in outreach with programs like the electric car day, Solarize Lowell, as well as Lowell's curbside recycling program. Going forward, we hope to do more.

The challenges we face are unprecedented. With the release of each new climate study, we learn that the effects of climate change are even more damaging than the scientists predicted. And we are already seeing those effects. California wildfires were so extensive last year that we could see the smoke from Christian Hill. Recent circumstances like flooding in Centralville and Pawtucketville in November and heat waves in August have adversely affected Lowell residents.

The City of Lowell has opportunities ahead to be a real leader in addressing climate change and environmental justice. We want to first bring some urgent opportunities pertaining to energy efficiency and transportation to your attention in the hopes that we can help the city act and be a resource to the City Council. These initiatives are described below.

Energy efficiency has been called by many in the fight for climate justice "the first fuel" in the path to carbon free buildings. It is not only effective at reducing Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions but also reduces energy burdens that low and moderate-income residents face which are an impediment to social mobility and economic empowerment. Lowell's poverty rate is nearly twice that of the Commonwealth, more than 50% of residents of Lowell are renters, and many are language isolated. As the State of Massachusetts becomes more aggressive with decarbonization strategies the City of Lowell cannot afford to do nothing. It will have failed its residents if the already disenfranchised residents are hit by high gas bills as wealthier towns embrace electrification. Failing to do something about this fast-approaching reality will be unjust. We ask that the council make it a priority to improve energy efficiency in the city.

The transportation sector is now the leading source of GHG emissions (over 40% in MA), and the largest contributor to air pollution that especially affects the very high number of people with asthma and other respiratory illnesses in Lowell. We realize that this will take time and

with asthma and other respiratory illnesses in Lowell. We realize that this will take time and resources, but federal and state funding opportunities are becoming increasingly available to cities like ours.

We encourage action in these four areas:

- invest in and improve public transportation (this includes the purchase of electric buses)
- enhance pedestrian and bike mobility in the city
- electrify municipal fleets and where possible due to contracts, school buses
- add charging infrastructure in convenient and visible areas

In addition to energy efficiency and transportation the Sustainability Council has other current and past initiatives:

- Road to 100% by 2035
- Recycling Subcommittee
- Heat Island study ([link it here](#))
- Communications via website/Facebook
- Community Choice Aggregation (CCA) with 45% additional renewable energy over state mandate
- Solar on High School
- Solarize Lowell + Heat Pumps

We cannot always rely on the state or federal government to protect the City of Lowell from the effects of climate change—the city must take action to protect its own future. In 2017 this city made a unanimous groundbreaking commitment to reduce fossil fuel reliance to 100% clean energy by 2035. While the city has made some good progress toward that goal, Lowell will need to redouble its efforts if the city hopes to achieve its ambitious goal of 100% renewable by 2035. Lowell is not alone in this. The city should continue to partner with UMass Lowell and other organizations to achieve our common goals.

The Lowell Sustainability Council is here to help. As a consistently meeting group of ten motivated members, we look forward to working with the City Council in the new year to help it navigate the important decisions that lie ahead. We hope that—decades from now—you will look back on the decisions made during your tenure as the tough, but necessary actions that ensured both the safety and prosperity of Lowell.

Regards,



Jay Mason, Chair
Lowell Sustainability Council